DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 294 HE 032 512

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Eckel, Peter; Hill, Barbara; Green, Madeleine; Mallon, Bill |
| TITLE | Reports from the Road: Insights on Institutional Change. On Change: An Occasional Paper Series of the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation. |
| INSTITUTION | American Council on Education, Washington, DC. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, MI. |
| PUB DATE | 1999-00-00 |
| NOTE | 22p.; For another On Change paper, see HE 032 511. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | American Council on Education Fulfillment Services, Department 191, Washington, DC 20055-0191 ($5). |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Evaluative (142) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Change Agents; Change Strategies; Colleges; Higher Education; Institutional Environment; *Leadership; *Long Range Planning; Organizational Development; *Strategic Planning; Universities |
| IDENTIFIERS | *American Council on Education |

ABSTRACT

This essay reflects on observations made during the four-year American Council on Education (ACE) Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation, an effort to help 26 diverse colleges and universities succeed with comprehensive or transformational change. Insights were drawn from three sources: biannual campus visits and monthly phone calls with campus leaders; reflections by institutional leaders in a series of reports and at four project meetings; and presentations and publications of institutional leaders. Nine successful intentional strategies for change are identified and paired with examples of missteps. Among these strategies are the following: (1) leaders must make a clear and compelling case to key stakeholders about why things must be done differently; (2) change leaders must craft an agenda that both makes sense and focuses on improvement without assigning blame; and (3) collaborative leadership identifies and empowers talent across campus and at various levels. The paper also identifies key environmental and contextual factors (and pitfalls), such as the need for a climate of good will, favorable external environments, and leadership persistence. The paper concludes that the actions of successful change leaders are characteristically intentional, reflective, and show an ability to profit from experience. A brief description of the ACE project and a list of participating institutions are attached. (DB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 435 294

# On Change

## Reports Towards a Realistic Progress

*An Occasional Paper Series of the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation*

*Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

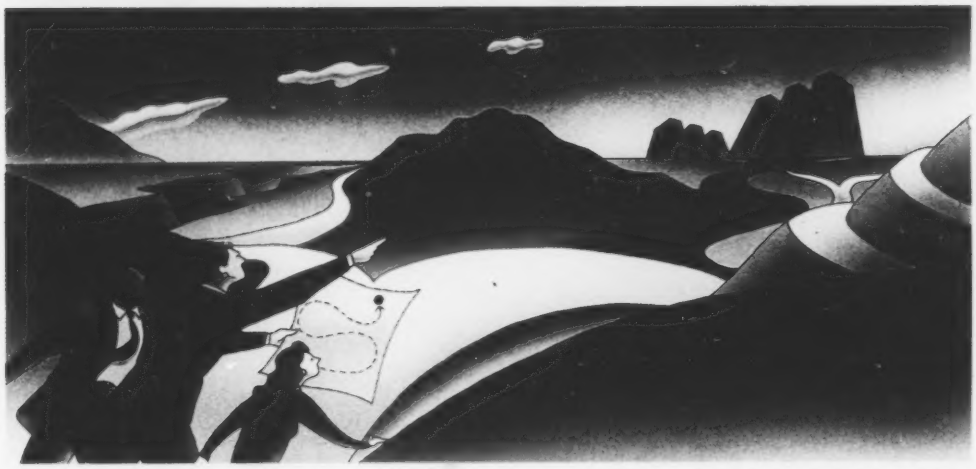
American Council on Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

HE 032 512

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Murray
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

# On Change



## Reports from the Road: Insights on Institutional Change

*Peter Eckel*
*Barbara Hill*
*Madeleine Green*
*Bill Mallon*

American Council on Education

*ACE would like to thank the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for its steadfast support of this project and for its commitment to strengthening higher education.*

*The authors are grateful to the talented project consultants whose acute observational and analytical skills were essential to the development of this essay:*

*Mary-Linda Armacost*
*Patricia Plante*
*Narcisa Polonio*
*Donna Shavlik*
*Robert Shoenberg*

Copyright © 1999

American Council on Education

Readers are encouraged to reproduce and widely disseminate this document. For permission to do so, please send a request stating how many copies will be made and the audience to whom the document will be distributed to:

American Council on Education
Center for Institutional and International Initiatives
One Dupont Circle
Washington, DC 20036
Fax: 202-785-8056
E-mail: Change_Projects@ace.nche.edu

Additional copies of this paper and *En Route to Tranformation* are available by sending a $5.00 check or money order to cover postage and handling to the following address:

ACE Fulfillment Services
Department 191
Washington, DC 20055-0191

# Foreword

*Reports from the Road* is the second in a series of papers emanating from the Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation, an ongoing initiative begun in 1994 and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Through these publications, we aim to share with a wide audience what the American Council on Education and the 26 participating institutions are learning.

We deliberately did not title this paper "lessons learned," a familiar title for this publication genre. We discovered early in the project that learning from the experience of other institutions is not merely a matter of recitation and assimilation of lessons.

Institutions are quick to invoke their uniqueness; whatever worked *there* will not automatically work *here*, says conventional wisdom, because we are so different. Yet, our project meetings showed how much institutions have in common, despite their differences in size, tradition, and mission. Our best conversations came from exploring commonalities in the light of differences; reflecting on each institution's uniqueness, yet knowing that it is possible to learn from others.

We hope this paper will help you sharpen your focus on *your* issues and *your* context. We believe that a great deal of this paper will ring true. It is up to you, the reader, to add the nuance and texture that will make this useful to leading change on your campus.

Madeleine F. Green
Vice President and Project Director
American Council on Education

# Reports from the Road

In spite of the abundant literature and "wisdom" about different approaches to and philosophies of intentional institution-wide change, such change is an extremely difficult undertaking and remains elusive for many college and university leaders. No two institutions use the same itinerary, and each maps the journey as it proceeds. For the past four years, 26 diverse colleges and universities have been working on a range of large-scale institutional change initiatives as part of the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation. From their experiences, we have drawn a set of observations about the factors that helped some participants make progress and prevented others from moving forward. While every institution is different–shaped by its own history and traditions and characterized by its own culture–we believe that colleges and universities can learn from the experiences of these participants.

The ACE Project, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, aimed to help colleges and universities succeed with comprehensive or transformational change–a deep and pervasive type of intentional change that affects the institution as a whole rather than its discrete parts.[1] Institutions undertook their change initiatives based upon internal decisions to act rather than as responses to external mandates, and the changes were often initiated centrally by campus administrators or faculty groups. While external pressures and forces often played a role, what distinguished these institutions was their *intentionality* about leading change.

The insights offered in this essay draw on three sources.[2] First, project consultants conducted biannual campus visits over a three-year period and held monthly phone calls with campus leaders. Second, representatives from the 26 institutions reflected on their experiences–their successes and frustrations–in a series of reports and at four project meetings. Finally, many institutional leaders gave presentations at national meetings and wrote articles and reports about their experiences with change.

Over their three-year engagement with the project, institutions that were consistently intentional and reflective developed new behaviors and strategies that could be and were used again and again. Colleges and universities that *learned* from their experiences gained new ways to respond to the challenges of their environments and developed new capacities with which to face the future successfully.

Most importantly, change leaders were guided by the recognition that change is not an event, with a beginning, middle, and comfortable end point. Rather it is an ongoing, organic process in which one change triggers another, often in unexpected places, and through which an interrelationship of the component parts leads to an unending cycle of reassessment and renewal. No wonder that change leaders so often worried about the dangers of burnout for all the key players and the anxiety that occurs when people realize that real change means there is no point in time at which everyone can declare a victory and go back to "normal life." As one provost put it, "Now that we have been through this

**While every institution is different—shaped by its own history and traditions and characterized by its own culture—we believe that colleges and universities can learn from the experiences of these participants.**

**The findings from the ACE project broaden and deepen common understanding about how intentional change occurs. They do not refute typically held views that "vision," "leadership," and "commitment" are central, but rather refine them by adding nuance and detail.**

incredibly difficult period of restructuring and program realignment, how do I tell the faculty that the next big change is already upon us?"

The second understanding, related to the first, is that comprehensive or transformational change requires holistic and integrated thinking about the institution. Rethinking undergraduate education is not just about changing course content or course offerings. It requires new approaches to student services, faculty development, assessment, and community involvement. While no institution can address everything all at once, the awareness that change triggers more change is an essential conceptual tool for leaders.

## Successful Strategies and Pitfalls

This essay explores the successful strategies and the missteps and pitfalls experienced by the 26 participating institutions as they sought to make major changes on their campuses. The first series of insights into successes and setbacks addresses *actions* that institutions take–factors they can control to bring about success. The second series relates to *context*–that is, the uncontrollable characteristics of the external and campus environments that facilitate or impede change. This series helps demonstrate that while intentionality and strategy are essential, not all factors associated with the change process can be controlled. Institutional history, as well as external forces and serendipity, may thwart or redirect a well-designed and well-executed change initiative.

The findings from the ACE project broaden and deepen common understanding about how intentional change occurs. They do not refute typically held views that "vision," "leadership," and "commitment" are central, but rather refine them by adding nuance and detail. For example, the frequently cited term "vision" is spelled out here as (1) leaders making a clear and compelling case about why things must be done differently and (2) leaders crafting a change agenda that makes sense and does not assign blame. The findings add new insights and challenge readers to examine more closely what they currently believe.

## Intentional Strategies

Institutional change occurs most effectively when directions and strategies are *intentional*. The following points elaborate on the patterns of successful strategies that institutional leaders can use and the missteps they can avoid.

### *Successful Strategy: Leaders make a clear and compelling case to key stakeholders about why things must be done differently.*

Institutional leaders who succeed with change initiatives clearly articulate why it is necessary and why current approaches no longer work. These leaders realize that key constituents must recognize the necessity for action before they willingly participate. The proposed change must address something considered important–such as the experiences of students or the faculty's professional lives–a *better* future rather than simply a different one.

Making a clear case for change requires multiple approaches. Some successful campuses use a data-driven approach, collecting numerical data and conducting studies to assess the extent of a problem. They use enrollment and retention numbers, student outcomes and placement data, and national and international comparisons to paint a comprehensive and nuanced picture of an issue. Other institutions link together more qualitative factors–what most faculty experience as a series of discrete and well-known "irritations," as one provost called them–and demonstrate that, together, they had a substantially negative impact on the institution.

Collecting the right data is not the only challenge. Successful leaders develop ways to engage the attention of the campus community, frequently by giving extensive information or summaries to the campus community so the extent of the problems becomes clear. Making a convincing case may involve many explicit dissemination strategies–regular presentations of data by institutional leaders to the faculty senate and other important constituencies, highly visible ad hoc task forces, widely disseminated reports, or monthly columns in a campus newspaper or on a web site devoted to the change initiative. More understated approaches include frequent hallway conversations and multiple references to change in presentations on other topics. Whatever strategies successful leaders use, in the end, members of the campus community need to have the opportunity to debate and explore the issues about *why* change is necessary and desirable.

**Misstep: Institutional leaders sought to implement a change not linked to a perceived need.**

Institutions struggled when leaders failed to garner interest in and support for change. In these cases, the agenda was usually identified by a small coterie of administrative leaders, typically with insufficient faculty input. The change initiative seemed detached from the concerns of the campus—a solution in search of a problem, or change for the sake of change. Change agendas did not generate enthusiasm if they were not meaningful to those affected by them or those expected to carry them out. The notion of change just because "change is in the air," as one person said, "was not enough."

Pressing concerns, such as financial distress, serious retention problems, or signs of internal dysfunction, can be quite clear. But the temptation to isolate a problem and look to some individual or group to solve it diverts campuses from acknowledging signs of institution-wide distress, which often requires a holistic approach.

***Successful Strategy: Change leaders craft an agenda that both makes sense and focuses on improvement without assigning blame.***

To be successful, a change agenda must make sense to those on campus and, at the same time, challenge values and practices that are no longer working. In other words, it must be congruent with the purposes and values of the institution, while pushing the institutionally defined boundaries of familiarity and comfort. For example, on one campus, the change agenda took into account and built upon the institution's long-standing and highly valued relationship with its local community; at another campus, the change agenda was framed to build upon deeply held values of helping at-risk students succeed. These well-articulated change agendas reinforced and reflected what was important to the institution and how it defined itself.

Successful change agendas are also framed so that they do not assign blame. They focus on improving the institution, not simply fixing it. Often campus leaders assiduously avoid the word "change," speaking only of improving quality, serving students, and enhancing teaching and learning. Change often threatens those who interpret the need for change as an indictment of their current or past knowledge, competence, or performance–a judgment that strikes them personally and deeply. Faculty and administrators invest significant time and energy in their institutions, sometimes giving their whole professional lives to a single campus. If they believe that the change effort implies failure on their part, they are likely to become defensive or resistant. Leaders of institutions that made progress crafted their agendas for change in terms of a better future and an improved institution without making people feel attacked or diminished. For example, several institutions generated support by framing their change agendas for enhancing technology use in the classroom around

**Whatever strategies successful leaders use, in the end, members of the campus community need to have the opportunity to debate and explore the issues about *why* change is necessary and desirable.**

**Whichever approach institutions use—starting small and linking together, or starting big and unbundling—successful comprehensive change depends on the combining of multiple change initiatives that, together, take the institution in the desired direction.**

improving student learning rather than focusing on a need to improve teaching.

Several institutional leaders began crafting change agendas by articulating the pressing issues as a series of questions without prematurely selling "solutions." This approach fostered the campus community's desire to be involved in constructing responses and devising solutions. The questioning process led to a collectively crafted vision of the future that excited all participants. Thus, a curriculum change began with the question, "What should a graduate of this institution know and be able to do?" A technology initiative started by addressing, "How would we like to improve teaching and learning at this institution? What can be accomplished through technology? What can be done through other means? What do we want to preserve?" Institutions found these questions had many different possible answers, implying multiple avenues of change. The process of forging agreement on the solutions both harnessed creativity and developed widespread ownership for the resulting change agendas.

***Successful Strategy: Change leaders develop connections among different initiatives and individuals across campus that create synergy and provide momentum for the initiative.***

Comprehensive change, which is both broad in scope and deep in impact, consists of a series of discrete, related changes that, when joined together, lead to large-scale change. A key to successful change for many participating institutions was finding and creating linkages among various activities occurring on their campuses. Some institutions began by articulating a comprehensive agenda and then identified the component parts, while others started by identifying small changes and then brought them together to create a larger, more ambitious change agenda. In both cases, the results reflected the institution's collective vision for the future. Whichever approach institutions use–starting small and linking together, or starting big and unbundling–successful comprehensive change depends on the combining of multiple change initiatives that, together, take the institution in the desired direction.

Connections and linkages within each institution help create and sustain the energy required for a long-term investment in change. On many campuses, multiple change initiatives provided an important range of opportunities with which numerous individuals could become involved. Additional energy was created because multiple projects facilitated new connections among individuals from different parts of the institution. These new connections, in turn, led to fresh conver-

**Misstep: Institutional leaders did not make the case that change is important, or they assumed that good, rational arguments were sufficient.**

Even when change leaders did identify an agenda that might have resonated with the campus, some did not make a compelling case to the campus community. Sometimes they simply did not spend the necessary time or exert the energy to make the case for change. A well-thought-out argument alone did not ensure that others would embrace the initiative. At some institutions, change leaders relied solely on presenting arguments that change would be beneficial—an approach that proved inadequate. They did not engage in the extensive process of listening to counter-arguments and identifying supporters, both of which are essential to building momentum. At other institutions, when senior leaders did not consistently reinforce the importance of change consistently, the initiative was perceived as just an additional burden. To extremely busy faculty and administrators, concerned with getting through their own "to do" lists, change was a nuisance. If individuals do not internalize the need for change, they will do nothing voluntarily to promote it.

**Misstep: Leaders articulated solutions without exploring problems.**

Change leaders who framed concerns as a set of solutions to be implemented frequently had difficulty gaining support from faculty for the change initiative. For example, one institution immediately jumped from a problem of student retention to a solution of improving faculty advising and lengthening new student orientation.[3] The change leaders did not speak with students, collect information about why students left, or pursue other potential responses, such as co-curricular structures, course offerings, faculty attitudes toward introductory courses, pedagogies used in those classes, or the effect of adjunct faculty and teaching assistants. On most campuses, individuals tend not to see the "same" problems, let alone the "same" solutions. Without a process to discuss the problems in depth and tap into the creativity and intelligence of the community in generating solutions, change initiatives rarely get off the ground.

sations that generated original ideas and strengthened shared purposes.

At the same time, successful institutions look outside themselves–through connections to other institutions, funding agencies, and national efforts–to provide the impetus to undertake a change initiative, enhance its legitimacy, and generate momentum to continue the efforts. Understanding how issues at a particular institution are tied to those of higher education in general–regionally, nationally, and internationally–helps leaders overcome the insularity that impedes movement. Change leaders use outside connections to help them explore operating assumptions, test ideas in a neutral or "safe" space, develop new solutions to old problems, and create networks with fellow change leaders. External connections like these set important public deadlines and give a degree of external accountability to an institution's change agenda. Some institutional leaders associated their efforts with several national projects, which provided multiple avenues for learning, comparing their institutions to others, measuring their successes, and celebrating them.

***Successful Strategy: Senior administrators support and are involved in institutional efforts.***

Successful change requires active participation by those with authority over budgets, personnel, and institutional priorities. Otherwise, change efforts do not receive the needed resources and generate nothing more than frustration. The experience of the participating institutions demonstrated that the support of the president or provost, both in word and in deed, is critical.

Successful change leaders recognize windows of opportunity created by everyday events and capitalize on serendipity, taking action or making decisions to move the change agenda forward. They facilitate progress on their change agenda by constantly focusing the attention of the institution on it–by regularly attending key meetings, setting agendas, allocating resources, and constantly sending messages that the change initiative is important. By paying attention to opportunities to effect change over the course of a typical week, leaders find small levers for change, which accumulate for a large impact over time. Getting things done requires timing, nuance, finesse, and sometimes just plain luck.

The participating institutions that made progress had active, involved leaders who took visible risks to reinforce the importance of the change initiative. They made both financial and human resources available. They removed institutional barriers and provided opportunities and structures through which the campus community could constructively cope with its fears and frustrations. For example, at one institution, the president invested money from the quasi-endowment in the change initiative, sending

**Understanding how issues at a particular institution are tied to those of higher education in general–regionally, nationally, and internationally–helps leaders overcome the insularity that impedes movement.**

**Effective leaders know when and how to become active players and when to step aside.**

a strong message to the campus that the change was of central importance and worthy of a financial risk.

In some instances, the most important role played by the president was to endorse the efforts and get out of the way. Those who have too dominant a role may create too great an identification of the change initiative with themselves personally, which thwarts the development of commitment among others and the empowerment of individuals best suited to lead the efforts. Effective leaders know when and how to become active players and when to step aside.

### *Successful Strategy: Collaborative leadership identifies and empowers talent across campus and at a variety of levels.*

The energy required to make progress on intentional change is not limited to senior administrative leaders, but rather taps into the capacities of many different individuals; leadership by faculty and mid-level administrators is critical. As one participant suggested: "Put the people in charge who understand both the change agenda and the institution." Individuals throughout the campus who possess stature, skills, talent, and credibility can help lead the change initiative by formulating and implementing a shared agenda for change. They can shape collective opinion, use their expertise to address a variety of institutional issues, and give credibility to the process and the products they helped create.

Participating institutions that made progress on their change agendas incorporated a variety of approaches to identify leadership talent throughout their institutions. Some used traditional means, such as relying on key institutional administrators, identifying leaders of important faculty committees, or selecting successful department chairs. In other institutions, key opinion shapers were asked to identify other campus leaders whom they admired. Those individuals, in turn, were asked to identify additional leaders, creating a large pool of potential collaborators. Another group of institutions invited everyone interested to participate and, over time, identified leaders from among the group of energetic volunteers.

**Misstep: Senior administrators were not sufficiently involved, or they tapped change leaders who were neither attentive nor influential.**

Although all of the participating institutions had support from their senior administrators, those that had only verbal support and sporadic involvement struggled. Institutions that did not make progress had leaders who may have set an initiative in motion but did not provide the necessary continued attention and support—they lit the furnace but did not stoke the fire. Lack of involvement by senior leaders sent a message that the change was unimportant, allowing the initiative to lose momentum or get derailed.

Institutions also struggled when leadership roles were given to individuals who lacked personal credibility, power, or authority to convene key players, alter institutional priorities, or reallocate needed resources (fiscal and/or human). If the change initiative lacked influential leaders, it had difficulty making progress.

### *Successful Strategy: Leaders develop supporting structures, create incentives, and provide resources for change efforts.*

Successful institutional leaders realize that a change initiative depends on a variety of structures, processes, and resources to facilitate and support it. Institutions can use a range of incentives to motivate key individuals to commit time and energy to the change process, including summer salaries, computer upgrades, conference travel money, and public recognition. For example, institutions that made progress on incorporating technology into teaching practices provided easily

accessible computer training for faculty members; they created processes to simplify acquisition of needed hardware, software, and consultation; and they offered curriculum development workshops. By removing barriers and creating supporting structures and processes, these campus leaders facilitated the adoption of new technologies. These opportunities also were flexible so that faculty could adopt new techniques in ways that met specific needs. Successful leaders did not force a "cookie-cutter" approach.

The academic calendar represents one structural obstacle that can be overcome. Some of the strategies for successful change include working year-round and using structured timetables that bring key players together frequently (for example, a two-hour meeting every other week). Also, successful leaders set public deadlines for tasks and publicly report findings through various forums and media, including campus newspapers and Web pages—simple but powerful tools to sustain forward movement during the year.

Successful leaders also recognize that to prosper, change initiatives require a visible financial commitment. With resources and support dedicated to a change initiative, the campus takes the agenda more seriously. For some institutions, this means leaders reallocating resources among units or efforts, and for others, it means looking outside the institution to raise new funds for the change agenda.

***Successful Strategy: Leaders focus campus attention on the change issue.***

To be successful with change initiatives, change leaders must resist getting engulfed by the turbulence that occurs in every institutional system and must keep campus attention focused on the issues at hand. Through the cumulative effect of a variety of tactics, some of which have been described earlier, they minimize distractions that quickly consume energy, demand attention, and thus derail the change efforts. They refer to the change agenda using consistent language and symbols in public presentations and make it part of everyday conversations. They use e-mail and the Web to communicate broadly about deliberations and results of project meetings and activities. One campus sent a brief e-mail summary of every task-force meeting on the change initiative to all faculty and staff. Successful leaders also develop incentives to embed the change agenda in the work of various individuals throughout the organization. They endorse projects on campus related to the larger issue. They hold campus symposiums, create faculty development activities, and sponsor nationally prominent speakers to focus campus attention.

Successful institutions do not rely on a single approach or make the change initiative solely the responsibility of one group. Rather, they recognize that the initiative is substantive enough to create multiple opportunities for various groups to work as partners. In addition, they do not allow new issues to steal attention. As new issues arise, leaders either ignore them, downplay their importance, or put them on hold; they quietly resolve them or give them to someone else to resolve; or they reframe them so they become part of the change efforts. Change leaders keep the initiative as the centerpiece of institutional business.

***Successful Strategy: Institutional change leaders work within a culture while challenging its comfort zone to change the culture.***

To make progress on a change initiative, an institution develops ways to operate paradoxically: changing its culture in ways congruent with its culture. Doing this may seem implausible, but institutions succeed at this difficult task when they understand how their culture works so they can intentionally create effective strategies. The change process must be compatible with an institution's own cultural

**Successful leaders also recognize that to prosper, change initiatives require a visible financial commitment. With resources and support dedicated to a change initiative, the campus takes the agenda more seriously.**

**The change process must be compatible with an institution's own cultural norms and standards or it appears illegitimate and inappropriate, and, in the end, is ineffective.**

norms and standards or it appears illegitimate and inappropriate, and, in the end, is ineffective. For example, successful institutional leaders use methods viewed as legitimate for identifying individuals to be members of change teams because they cannot impose a method inconsistent with campus patterns of participation and decision making. They recognize that violating the traditions and structures of campus-wide decision making dooms change efforts to failure.

Changing an institution's culture (or one of its multiple cultures) requires challenging it–operating in ways that are new and sometimes uncomfortable. For example, in many institutions, curricular change was traditionally accomplished through the standing committees and faculty senate. However, change leaders realized that while the usual mechanisms could produce some adjustments to the curriculum, they were unlikely to produce "out of the box" thinking or really original designs. Their approach was to create a series of ad hoc groups and hold a number of open meetings to allow for broad discussion and input. To respect the culture, and thereby ensure legitimacy, they made certain that faculty leaders in key positions and opinion leaders were members of the ad hoc groups. They also were careful to take decisions back through the established committee and senate process, but only after significant groundwork was done to ensure widespread ownership and support.

**Misstep: Leaders became preoccupied with other issues.**

Some of the institutions struggled because their leaders became preoccupied with other issues after embarking on a change initiative. Sometimes new institutional agendas were set because of some abrupt change in the environment; among the most common were new priorities set by boards of trustees or state legislatures. At other institutions, the leaders originally pursued a change issue that did not resonate with the campus community, and it was eventually superseded by more appropriate initiatives. At yet others, new leaders brought their own institutional agendas that did not "stick"; they were not a close enough fit with perceived campus needs. Over time, all of these campuses lost interest in the original agenda and began work on a new set (or sets) of concerns.

***Successful Strategy: Leaders plan for change over the long term.***

Achieving comprehensive, intentional change is a long process, and successful change leaders develop strategies that capture and hold collective attention over many semesters and through distractions. For many institutions, this means spending time laying the groundwork for change. For example, some institutional leaders took steps to build credibility and develop a sense of institutional commitment prior to getting down to the work of transformational change. Other leaders looked at change in terms of a four-year cycle, which is how long it took a new cohort of students to "live" through the changes completely and to have all students under a common, and new, system. Still other institutions invested in staff and faculty development programs with an expectation that change would not occur overnight and that foundations of new skills and ways of thinking and behaving first had to be adopted. For example, two institutions sent staff and faculty leaders to off-campus leadership development programs. At one of those institutions, the program participants returned to create new leadership development activities for other faculty and staff consistent with the goals of the change initiative.

By recognizing that planning for long-term change requires different assumptions and strategies than short-term change, campus leaders also weigh the effects of particular strategies and reject those with only short-term returns if they can potentially derail the change efforts later. They choose

not to fight some battles or to modify their time frames. They realize a short-term mindset may lead to more harm than benefit, and thus they prepare for and understand the consequences of long-term change. For instance, rather than push through a change during one academic year, administrators at two institutions tapped into the schedules and rhythms of their academic senates, which lengthened their time frames.

### Environmental and Contextual Factors

An institution's potential success or failure with a change initiative does not depend solely on the strategies it uses; its historical and external contexts are critical as well. Below are three situations that significantly affect institutional change efforts.

#### *Contributing Factor: Institutions have a climate of good will.*

The work of change in the academy is collective, and the bedrock of collective action is good will and trust. This climate exists when individuals feel that others are acting in good faith, that they themselves are heard, that information is not being hidden, that they are free to draw their own conclusions rather than be told what to think, and that individuals can be trusted to do what is best for the institution. Institutions with good will are places where a critical mass of faculty believe that administrators are not only interested in the bottom line or in advancing their careers, but also are concerned about teaching, learning, and research. While mistrust is frequently attributed to relationships between faculty and administrators, it also characterizes some relationships among faculty and among administrators. Climates of good will are created over time; they are byproducts of a history of effective relationships and productive conflict resolution within the faculty and between faculty and administrators.

#### Pitfall: Institutions were in conflict.

Institutions characterized by internal conflict—administrators pitted against faculty or subsets of faculty working against one another—had difficulty making progress with change initiatives. Sometimes factions could not agree on the problems, let alone a course of action. Other times, mistrust meant that articulated courses of action were scrutinized for hidden agendas and power plays. If competing factions could not resolve their differences, the campus remained deadlocked—paralyzed by endless debates and arguments, slow-down tactics, disengagement, and, sometimes, outright sabotage. As one person said, "Faculty rarely get up and throw things to protest; they just choose not to do anything."

Although passive resistance is a weapon of choice in the academy, overt warfare is hardly unknown. Some institutions struggled through votes of no confidence, lawsuits challenging institutional directives, union conflict, and disruptive faculty leadership. These conflicts tended to absorb everyone's time and energy, becoming a focal point that eclipsed the agenda for change.

Participating institutions that made progress with change had sufficient good will to overcome the mistrust that characterizes many campuses. At these institutions, administrators generally believed that faculty were concerned about institutional well-being beyond their disciplinary boundaries. Institutions that offered success stories about a climate of good will talked about abundant communication, the free flow of information, and genuine participation.

Some participating institutions that did not have a history of good will spent significant time and energy working to create a climate of trust. Change leaders realized that their efforts would make little progress unless they first developed good will to overcome a history of poor relations between faculty and administrators. For example, some institutions opened up their budget processes, bringing faculty into decision making while

**Participating institutions that made progress with change had sufficient good will to overcome the mistrust that characterizes many campuses.**

**...institutional leaders in high-stress environments must find ways to deflect externally generated static to make progress on their change agendas.**

simultaneously educating them about the institution's financial constraints. Other institutions put information on their web site so individuals around campus could access it easily and draw their own conclusions. Some leaders built good will by getting faculty and administrators to work collectively on small projects with tangible results, allowing individuals to become acquainted with one another and to build trust around shared tasks. One institutional leader described the three-year engagement with their change initiative as a crucial trust-building exercise–a prelude to undertaking even more important change. They succeeded in getting new players to the table, holding civil conversations, and working on common tasks in ways that had been impossible in previous years. The visible and measurable successes the groups achieved and the new habits they developed allowed them to move on to a more complex, integrated set of change issues.

***Contributing Factor: Institutions have favorable external environments.***

Environmental stress affects an institution's ability to succeed with change. On a continuum with three broad categories–low stress, medium stress, and high stress–institutions in the middle have the most favorable environment in which to create intentional change because a certain amount of stress creates an impetus for change without being disabling. Institutions in low- and high-stress environments also can make progress, but more slowly or with more difficulty.

Institutions in low-stress environments must develop strategies to generate energy for change. For example, leaders in these institutions must work to make a compelling case for why the status quo is not acceptable. One participant reported the typical feeling on such a campus: "When you are rich and things are going well, why change?" At the other end of the continuum, institutional leaders in high-stress environments must find ways to deflect externally generated static to make progress on their change agendas. In these institutions–with new problems constantly arising or old ones recurring–leaders have the additional challenge of acting as a buffer against outside stressors so that the institution can concentrate and spend the required time and energy on the desired change.

***Contributing Factor: Leaders stay long enough for the change to take hold.***

As already described, leadership is extremely important in making intentional change. Institutions that make progress benefit from consistent leadership, both from senior administrators and from others throughout the campus. Leaders who stay provide sustained support for the change initiative, reinforce the importance of the change initiative over time, are in positions to keep campus attention focused over the long run, and provide a continuous stream (even if just a trickle) of resources. Most important, they provide consistency in the process and play the important role of champion.

Leadership turnover is often a decisive factor in institutional success or failure. Many participating institutions experienced

**Pitfall: Institutions had chaotic environments.**

Chaotic environments hurt change efforts because institutions with relentless demands placed upon them—by their boards of trustees, state legislatures, and alumni—struggle for every small achievement on their change agendas. These institutions are in an almost permanent reactive mode, forcing them to direct their attention away from change agendas and leaving them with little time, energy, or money to make progress toward their goals. In some participating institutions, a fatalistic attitude developed; individuals felt they could not control their destiny, which led to collective disenchantment and little hope for taking charge of change.

**Pitfall: Leaders departed at critical times.**

Losing a leader or leaders at important junctions can impede change. For example, after an exodus of some key campus leaders at one institution, an administrator noted that "no one cares anymore or even knows why we were doing this." This institution lost the individuals who were the champions of the change initiative and who shared the same set of priorities. In another scenario, change leaders at the institution became distracted by the search process and the transition from one leader to another—especially traumatic because the departing leader was well liked. Leadership transitions also impede change at some institutions because new leaders want to chart a different course and craft a new change agenda. Not surprisingly, too many new leaders and new change agendas create fatigue and cynicism among faculty, who may be inclined to wait until the current leader moves on and the latest change agenda disappears with him or her.

changes of presidents, provosts, or key faculty at critical points in the change process. Those that continued to make progress in spite of turnover were characterized by leadership at many levels of the institution because they had intentionally widened the leadership circle. When many individuals on campus become the champions of change–a result of purposefully involving new cohorts of potential leaders–wide ownership of the agenda continues efforts beyond the tenure of any single administrator or faculty leader.

Leadership turnover is not something that can be commanded or controlled; leaders leave for numerous reasons. Yet the timing of a leader's departure is critical. When a change initiative has not had time to develop a wide and deep base of support, the departure of a key leader is likely to stall or sink the process. Some institutions facing a leadership transition can continue their efforts–in some cases, almost without interruption–because they have developed momentum based on widespread leadership: The initiative does not rest with one person or even a small cohort of leaders. Participating institutions that had been working on change for several years continued to make progress after leaders left because the initiative had many champions and was no longer dependent upon the vision and guidance of a few.

**Leadership turnover is often a decisive factor in institutional success or failure.**

## Conclusion

No precise mixture of strategies led some institutions in the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation down the road to success while others stumbled. In fact, three years' involvement with these colleges and universities is not sufficient time to predict which will ultimately succeed and which, if any, will fail. The 26 institutions were in different stages of the change process when they entered the project. Some had embarked on their change initiatives when they joined the ACE project; others had been working on their efforts for several years. Each institution had its ups and downs, its mistakes and unexpected victories. Some started with huge energy and then faltered; others took a while to get going. Charting the course of change is as difficult as predicting its effects.

Though these insights comprise neither a 12-step program to institutional transformation nor a guarantee of success in future change initiatives, we believe their power lies in their associated lessons of intentionality and reflection. No matter how many "successful strategies" an institution employed or how well the strategies were executed, the success of each initiative was linked with three habits of mind displayed by the change leaders:

- They were *intentional* in their actions. Change was an act to be managed, not a happenstance to be endured.
- They were *reflective* on their change endeavors.

• They *learned* from their actions and adjusted their plans. Their change agendas were dynamic, not static, suggesting that the strategies and behaviors learned could be used again and again, giving them new ways to respond to the challenges of their environments.

The early results of the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation demonstrate that institutions of higher education can change successfully in deep and pervasive ways. The experiences of the 26 institutions indicate that change is both complex and surprising–positively and negatively–and at the same time, that the intentional pursuit of the successful strategies outlined here can lead to meaningful, thriving, comprehensive change.

**Endnotes**

[1] For further discussion on transformation in higher education, please see Eckel, P., B. Hill, & M. Green. 1998. *En Route to Transformation,* On Change: An Occasional Paper Series, No. 1. Washington DC: American Council on Education.

[2] For additional information on methodology, please see Eckel, P. 1997. "Capturing the Lessons Learned: The Evaluation Process for the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation." ERIC Document #415 809).

[3] To provide anonymity for institutions that struggled, circumstances are altered from original contexts.

# The ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation

In 1995, with funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the American Council on Education (ACE) launched a three-and-a-half-year project with 26 diverse colleges and universities to help them take charge of change. The goals of the project were:

1. To help each institution create, implement, and evaluate progress on its change agenda;

2. To help each institution develop a laboratory that would allow it to reflect upon and better understand its change process and enhance its capacity for future change;

3. To highlight and analyze experiences and lessons that could be adapted by other colleges and universities; and

4. To disseminate the findings and issues raised by the project to a wider national and international audience.

The first phase of the project (1995-1998) was structured to help institutions identify and implement their agendas for change, focusing both on substantive change themes and on change processes. It provided frameworks and materials to help institutions specify their intended outcomes and design processes for achieving them. The project created opportunities for institutions to share experiences and strategies. Through meetings, inter-institutional visits, and consultations, ACE maintained regular contact with participating colleges and universities. The project collected information about institutional successes and setbacks through periodic reports, site visit summaries, and project meetings. In the second phase of the project (1998-2000), ACE is assembling a team of researchers and practitioners to conduct an annual site visit to each of the institutions and hold an annual meeting of project leadership teams.

The 26 institutions participating in the first phase were selected through a national competition and represent the diversity of American colleges and universities. The institutions and their change initiatives were:

**Ball State University (IN)**
Defining, Refining, and Implementing the Teacher- Scholar Model in a Technological Environment

**Bowie State University (MD)**
Creating a Transcending Institution

**California State Polytechnic University, Pomona**
Developing an Integrated Campus Strategy for Enhancing Learning and Teaching with Technology

**Centenary College of Louisiana**
Quality Teaching and Scholarship

**The City College of the City University of New York**
Maximizing Student Success

**College of DuPage (IL)**
Creating an Environment of Change

**El Paso Community College District (TX) Managing**
Change in a System of Shared Governance

**Kent State University (OH)**
Reconceptualizing Faculty Roles and Rewards

**Knox College (IL)**
Faculty Roles and Rewards

**Maricopa County Community College District (AZ)**
Achieving the Desired Learning Paradigm

**Michigan State University**
Enhancing the Intensity of the Academic Environment

**Mills College (CA)**
Strengthening the Interrelationship between Undergraduate Women's Education and Specialized Graduate Programs for Women and Men

**Northeastern University (MA)**
The Academic Common Experience

**Olivet College (MI)**
Creating a Climate of Social Responsibility

**Portland State University (OR)**
Developing Faculty for the Urban University of the 21st Century

**Seton Hall University (NJ)**
Transforming the Learning Environment

**State University of New York College at Geneseo**
Reforming the Undergraduate Curriculum

**Stephen F. Austin University (TX)**
Revitalizing Faculty, Staff, and Administration

**University of Arizona**
Department Heads: Catalysts for Building Academic Community

**University of Hartford (CT)**
Planning and Managing Technology

**University of Massachusetts, Boston**
Improving Teaching and Learning and Student Services Through Assessment

**University of Minnesota**
Improving the Collegiate Experience for First-Year Students

**University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras**
Reconceptualizing the Baccalaureate Degree

**University of Wisconsin—La Crosse**
Building Community: An Approach to Academic Excellence

**Valencia Community College (FL)**
Becoming a Learning-Centered College

**Wellesley College (MA)**
Improving Intellectual Life at the College

For more information on institutions and their change initiatives, please see the ACE web site: www.acenet.edu.

## ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation

Madeleine Green
*Vice President and Project Director*

Peter Eckel
*Assistant Director*

Barbara Hill
*Senior Fellow*

Colleen Allen
*Project Associate*

Bill Mallon
*Project Intern*

Gina Kemp
*Project Associate*

**Project Consultants**

Mary-Linda Armacost

Patricia Plante

Narcisa Polonio

Donna Shavlik

Robert Shoenberg

# ACE Board of Directors

**OFFICERS**

**John A. DiBiaggio**
President, Tufts University
*Chair*

**Michael F. Adams**
President, University of Georgia
*Vice Chair/Chair Elect*

**Lois B. DeFleur**
President, State University of New York at Binghamton
*Immediate Past Chair*

**Anne S. McNutt**
President, Technical College of the Lowcountry
*Secretary*

*Class of 1999*

**Vernon O. Crawley**
President, Moraine Valley Community College

**Lois B. DeFleur**
President, State University of New York at Binghamton

**John V. Lombardi**
President, University of Florida

**Walter E. Massey**
President, Morehouse College

**Anne S. McNutt**
President, Technical College of the Lowcountry

**Miguel A. Nevarez**
President, University of Texas-Pan American

**Kenneth A. Shaw**
President/Chancellor, Syracuse University

**Julianne Still Thrift**
President, Salem College

*Class of 2000*

**Robert M. Berdahl**
Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley

**Molly C. Broad**
President, University of North Carolina

**Philip R. Day, Jr.**
Chancellor, City College of San Francisco

**John A. DiBiaggio**
President, Tufts University

**Vera King Farris**
President, Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

**Freeman A. Hrabowski, III**
President, University of Maryland Baltimore County

**Neil Rudenstine**
President, Harvard University

**William Segura**
Chancellor, Texas State Technical College System

*Class of 2001*

**Michael F. Adams**
President, University of Georgia

**David G. Carter**
President, Eastern Connecticut State University

**Janet L. Holmgren**
President, Mills College

**Peter Ku**
Chancellor, Seattle Community College District

**Harry C. Payne**
President, Williams College

**Hugo Freund Sonnenschein**
President, University of Chicago

**Jerry Sue Thornton**
President, Cuyahoga Community College

**William E. Troutt**
President, Belmont University

## ACE Board of Directors, continued

*Association Representatives*

**Association of American Colleges & Universities**
Judith A. Ramaley, President
University of Vermont

**American Association of Community Colleges**
Augustine P. Gallego, Chancellor
San Diego Community College District

**American Association of State Colleges & Universities**
Ed M. Elliott, President
Central Missouri State University

**Association of American Universities**
Francis L. Lawrence, President
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

**Association of Catholic Colleges & Universities**
Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, President
Mount St. Mary's College

**Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities**
Harold Ridley, SJ, President
Loyola College in Maryland

**Council of Independent Colleges**
Harold M. Kolenbrander, President
Mount Union College

**National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education**
Shirley A.R. Lewis, President
Paine College

**National Association of Independent Colleges & Universities**
Ann H. Die, President
Hendrix College

**National Association of State Universities & Land-Grant Colleges**
Peter McPherson, President
Michigan State University

**Council for Higher Education Accreditation**
Gordon A. Haaland, President
Gettysburg College

**Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities**
John J. Moder, President
St. Mary's University

**Washington Higher Education Secretariat**
Sheila Trice Bell, Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer
National Association of College and University Attorneys

American Council on Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE